=~=~=~=

A-ONE #0903   09/19/06

~ More New Spam Tricks! ~ People Are Talking!   ~ Phisher: 101 Years?
~ Net Neutrality Debate! ~ Beijing Games Has Fits ~ Storm Worm Strikes!
~ MySpace Hit With Suits ~ New Hitman E-mail Scam ~ Web Accessibility!

~ Universal Phishing Kit ~ Botnet Gang Faces Jail ~ PS3 Demand Gone Soft!

-* MySpace Parental Notification *-
-* Seagate Claims World's Fastest Drive *-
-* Microsoft To Make Vista Available Online! *-

=~=~=~=

->From the Editor's Keyboard   "Saying it like it is!"
  """"""""""""""""""""""""""""

I want to apologize for last week. I was really in a foul mood and it
was showing. I may not have much to say in the regard of Atari
computing these days - for obvious reasons - but this is no place to blow
off steam on matters of a personal nature.

So, let's vent about some other topics for a change, as well as throw
kudos when warranted. First of all, I've been using a PC lately to do
A-ONE. Yes, I've broken one of my cardinal rules of using a non-Atari
machine to do this magazine, but my Falcon's hard drive(s) have gone
the way of the dinosaur. While I have been provided a replacement
drive (thanks Fred!), I just haven't had the time to take apart my
Falcon and attempt the swap of drives. And a few months ago, I bought
a new PC, an HP Pavilion. Nice machine. The other day, while working
on an issue of A-ONE, I started to notice that I couldn't use my keyboard
shortcuts to cut and paste text. You know the one, Control-C to copy and
Control-V to paste. My Control keys didn't work. Then the Caps Lock key
failed.

I called Circuit City, where I bought the machine, to see if they would
provide me a replacement. No way - the store warranty was long past. So
I decided to call HP. 45 minutes later, after the tech support people
had me unplug everything, uninstall the keyboard drivers, reattach
everything and reinstall the drivers - the keys were still unresponsive.
They told me they would send me out a new keyboard. Less than 24 hours
later, I had a new keyboard! Now that's what I call great tech support
and customer service! The tech support person even called me the
following day to make sure it arrived and everything was working
properly. Impressive in my book.

Part of the reason that I've tended to not use my Falcon (or any other
Atari computer for that matter) has been fast internet access. While I
don't require speed that is blazingly fast, I do want to achieve my web
use in a timely manner. While I had success with my Falcon a couple of
years, my needs have grown. Waiting for page refreshes just isn't an
option any longer. I want to get online, do what I need or want to do,
and move on to other things. One of the things I've been doing lately
is updating some of our A-ONE sites - specifically our past issues areas.
My normal repository on Delphi has grown beyond available space. So, in
order to keep the relatively recent past issues active, the older ones
became inactive. So, I moved them all to the new atarinews.org server
thanks to Rob Mahlert and Joe Mirando. The pages there are done, and I
have moved all back issues there. Now all I have to do is finish renaming
the issues because everything is case-sensitive. Naturally, I'm on the

short end of that stick and need to re-name 75% of the files. Would I
attempt this project using my Falcon? No way! So, if you're looking for
those past issues you may have missed over the years, you can find them
via my A-ONE teaser site (see link above). I think there are only a few
issues that seem to be missing, but I'll search my personal archives to
make them available shortly.

What can you say about the weather we've been seeing this past week,
nationally and globally? While it's been really cold here on the East
coast, the rest of the country has been getting some unbelievable
weather lately! Snow and ice in southern California?! Blizzards and
massive ice storms in the Rockies and deep south! We got some ice storms
to the north and west of us, but nothing serious in my immediate area.
Yes, we got a little rain and a few snow flurries, but we managed to
escape pretty much unscathed again here. If I had to describe this all,
I would use two words: rare and inconvenience. We're more than half way
through January and there is barely a coating of snow on the ground from
last night s snow. Anything we've had the past couple of weeks has been
just a slight inconvenience if you're the type of person who quickly
goes out to make sure the walk and driveway is cleared, rather than
waiting for the sun to melt it away.   Me, I tend to play it safe and go
out after awhile and make sure both are not slippery. I'm not as agile
as I once was, so I don't need any help finding a way to end up on my
butt needlessly!

Watching the news, I've seen what these weather conditions have caused.
Cars all over the roads, with multiple mishaps everywhere you look.
People just don't know how to drive in such weather, or they're in too
much of a rush to be cautious. And look at the weather in the UK lately.
Hurricane-force winds blowing people around like matchsticks! Crazy!

So, as I wrap up this week's issue, I'll have my favorite internet radio
station playing music in the background while the television has golf
tuned in from sunny Palm Springs. At least they're playing golf
somewhere in the country that is reasonably warm. As to my other pet
peeve for the day, I wish that I could find a new Nintendo Wii console so
I could play some simulated golf! Maybe in a month or so. Maybe not.

Until next time...

                          =~=~=~=

                      PEOPLE ARE TALKING
                    compiled by Joe Mirando
                      joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. This isn't going to be a 'regular'
column... not enough messages... again. Maybe everyone is afraid of
this new secret warrantless spy program. Have you heard of it? No?
That's why it's secret!

We're all on double secret probation, folks. And whether you're a Quaker
or a rabble rouser like me or just an average joe, it should give you
pause.

I've tried (and not always succeeded, I admit) to keep my opinions on politics out of this column. But, for better or worse, sometimes I've just got to cut it loose and spill some attitude.

Whether you agree with me or not (and right around half the U.S. population does not), you should at least keep your eyes open and wonder about what's going on. Sure, you can SAY that you're willing to put up with some infringement in order to insure a little security, but be honest... you're only saying/thinking that because you figure it'll never really come down to that, aren't you?

Okay, let me bottom-line it for you... there is no such thing as "a little" infringement of rights. There never has been, and there never will be. You can throw up all the pictures of boogiemen that you want to; you can make that little rainbow-colored threat chart dance like a limberjack; you can even spread fear of anything that's different and postulate upon what "the other guy" would be doing to make things worse. But none of that changes the fact that bartering away rights is a dangerous business that imperils us all. Using fear to guide policy is pandering to the lowest, basest instincts, and always results in bad decisions. For more generations than the average high school student can count without using his fingers, we've trusted in the processes of our government and the rule of law to show us the way. Sure, we've made some mis-steps along the way, but we've even learned from those.

But there are things going on now... Signing Statements, National Security Letters, sneak & peek searches, warrantless wiretaps, re-defining such esoteric terms as 'torture' and 'enemy combatant', not to mention things like calling the Geneva Conventions 'quaint'... that should, if not worry you, at least make you wonder about things.

So what should we... you and I as individuals... do? Well, for starters, you can write to your Senators. Write to your Congressman. Let them know what your opinion is. I don't really care what your opinion is... it's yours and you're entitled to it and you should make it known and keep making it known and the rest of us should support you're doing so and make sure that you have the ability to keep doing it. That's the cornerstone of our little corner of the world. It's what makes this place work. Now, let me ask you this: Can you really imagine my mirror-image saying the same thing? Can you picture 'them' saying, "Sure you're entitled to voice your opinion. That's what this country was founded on. Go ahead and tell us what you honestly think about what we're doing." Yah. Sure.

Our elected officials are our servants. They are supposed to be the guardians of our way of life, not an imperial court. I think it's time we reminded them of that. What makes me so sure that the ability to openly express dissent is a good thing is this: Whether you agree with my political opinions or not, you giving your opinions voice only strengthens the rest of us. Agree or disagree with things... that's not the important part. The important part is that you voice your opinions. The only time you weaken us is when you remain silent. It weakens YOUR position. It weakens mine. It weakens all of us. If you really want to weaken your own position to spite me or someone else, well, I guess you've missed the point of all of this.

You have no way of knowing this, but I just came back inside after the third motor vehicle accident in ten minutes across the street from my

house. There's a gentle, sloping curve, a telephone pole, and a light
frozen glaze on the road. We're not in the middle of a real ice storm
like they're having in Texas and Oklahoma, but it's enough to take the
odd unsuspecting driver by surprise and push them into a guardrail, a
telephone pole or a ditch 20 yards away from the road.

It's too late for tonight, but the next time you're driving in the cold
and there's snow or slush on the road, please pay attention and act
like every curve hides a hazard... because it just might.

Okay, I'm going to step down off my dual soap boxes for now. Tune in
again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to
what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

                                =~=~=~=

->In This Week's Gaming Section - Demand for PS3s Softening?
  """"""""""""""""""""""""""""""""   'Warcraft' Expansion Pack!
                                    Want Winter? Get Lost Planet!

                                =~=~=~=

->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News   - The Latest Gaming News!
  """""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""

              PS3s In Stock Show Demand May Be Softening

More than half of a group of surveyed stores had Sony Corp.'s PlayStation 3
in stock, while Nintendo Co. Ltd.'s new Wii was sold out, an analyst said
on Tuesday in a report signaling demand for the market leader's new console
may be soft.

"Our channel checks yesterday of 52 retail stores, from boutiques to
big-box retailers, showed that 28 of the 52 stores had PS3 consoles in
stock, while none had Wii consoles in stock," American Technology Research
analyst Paul-Jon McNealy said in the research note.

He added that those stores with PS3s in stock typically had units numbering
in the low single digits, with only one major retailer having 60-plus
machines in stock.

McNealy said availability in stores of PS3s, which are more expensive than
Wiis, does not necessarily indicate slack demand and that he would continue
to monitor PS3 inventories closely.

New video game consoles tend to be in very short supply for months after their release as demand for the latest new machines outweigh manufacturers' ability to turn them out.

Supplies of Sony's PS3 have been limited in the weeks since its mid-November launch and units sitting on store shelves could indicate weak demand for the powerful new machine, which boasts cutting-edge graphics and the company's Blu-Ray high-definition DVD player.

By comparison, shortages of Microsoft Corp.'s Xbox 360, released in mid-November 2005, lasted well into early 2006.

Nintendo sold 604,200 Wiis in the United States in December, topping Sony's PS3 sales of 490,700. Sales of the Xbox 360, which has been available for a year longer than the PS3 and Wii, hit 1.1 million in December, retail market research firm NPD said last week.

Sony last week said it shipped 1 million PS3s to North America by the end of 2006, hitting its target by diverting some units from Japan. The high-end version of the console retails for $600 in the United States.

The Japanese company, which saw its PlayStation 2 dominate the last console cycle, said on Tuesday it had shipped 1 million PS3s to Japan and that global shipments reached 2 million in about two months after the launch, compared with its original target to hit the figure by the end of December.

The PS3 launch was beset by manufacturing delays and speculation is rising that the company will fall far short of its 6 million global shipment target by March.

                    Late 'Warcraft' Expansion Pack To Debut

Each day, millions of people around the world gaze at their computer screens to explore a dangerous fantasy world of treasure-filled dungeons and flame-breathing dragons, a land where mortal enemies lurk around every corner.

It's the "World of Warcraft," the most successful online game ever, and it's a world about to get a whole lot bigger with Tuesday's release of a $39.99 enhancement called "The Burning Crusade."

From China to the United States, from Australia to Europe, more than 8 million registered users now pay up to $15 a month to gather with hundreds of other real people who masquerade as digital avatars in the never-ending fantasy world of Azeroth.

"The Burning Crusade" adds new locales such as Karazhan, Hellfire Citadel and Tempest Keep to Azeroth, and presents a spiraling war against demonic forces where the game's two opposing factions - the Alliance and the Horde - will face powerful new enemies.

Players will have access to the new realm of Outland that's nearly as large as the existing game world, and the highest level characters can achieve has been raised from 60 to 70.

There are two new races to choose from as well: the remnants of an ancient space-faring civilization called the Draenei, and the Blood Elves, who are addicted to arcane magic.

But in a market already overpopulated with dwarves, paladins and trolls, is there room for even more of the same? If fans are any indication, the answer is a definite yes.

Trey Hancock, 26, has been shooting fireballs and frost novas to crush his mortal enemies in the video game "World of Warcraft" since it first launched in 2004. In his years of playing, the Houston resident led a guild of more than 200 people and raised four characters to the current top level of 60, including his main character, a mage named Oraj.

Like many others, Hancock said he took a break in anticipation of the expansion, where his first goal will be to take Oraj to level 70.

"I haven't played for the last week because I know once it comes out I'm going to be playing it nonstop," he said.

It's just the sort of enthusiasm the company behind the game, Blizzard Entertainment Inc., is banking on.

"We were going to be happy if we got a million worldwide subscribers, we didn't feel like that was shooting the moon," said Rob Pardo, Blizzard's vice president of game design and the lead designer for "World of Warcraft." "The way it blew up is far beyond our wildest expectations. But now that we are at the mark we are, we feel there's still an ability to grow that customer base even further."

Released in November 2004, "World of Warcraft" brought several new elements to the genre of massive multiplayer online roleplaying games, or MMORPGs. Most significantly, it was simple to play and a had high level of polish, according to Jon Wood, managing editor of the gaming Web site MMORPG.com.

"I think Blizzard looked at what was out there and found out what worked and what didn't work," he said. "The truth of the matter is, the game is very polished. The fact that it's very smooth and easy to learn has put them out front."

Pardo said polish has always been the mantra for the game's creators.

"It's extremely complicated, all the things we have to get right," he said. "We were on track for a Christmas release but we really felt like we should make sure the product's right for our customers."

"Warcraft's" popularity has transcended video game culture and spawned a series of action figures, comic books, novels and trading cards.

The game was even the focus of a recent "South Park" episode where Eric Cartman and friends balloon into overweight, pimply video addicts bent on defeating a rampaging player who threatens the very existence of the game.

The pop culture references extend into the game world, too. If you type "/dance" as a male Blood Elf, for example, your character will strut around with moves similar to the uberdorky hero of the movie "Napoleon Dynamite."

"We're all entertainment geeks ourselves," Pardo said. "Part of our design process is having fun and putting in those references. It's kind of our

way of giving homage to the things that inspire us."

David Daryani, owner of Tru-Gamerz video gaming center in Dallas, said his customers regularly queue up to play the game, especially on the weekends. As a longtime "WoW" player himself, Daryani, 38, said he hasn't played much lately but was looking forward to seeing the new content and returning to his favorite activity: player versus player combat.

"If you have a bad day, you get on and say 'I'm just going to kick some Alliance butt,'" he said. "It just relieves some stress."

Despite Flaws, 'Lost Planet' Is Worth Exploring

The forecast calls for a blizzard, but it looks more like snow flurries. Touting it as an "epic gaming masterpiece," Capcom releases snowy sci-fi adventure Lost Planet: Extreme Condition, a solid action shooter that fails to live to its potential.

Your character, Wayne, is found encased in ice by snow pirates on the planet E.D.N. III. All he remembers is his name and the alien creature that killed his father. As Wayne begins his quest to find the Akrid, a buglike alien species, he slowly pieces together his past.

In order to survive, Wayne must collect thermal energy. This power source serves almost as a high-powered armor for Wayne as well as fuel for mechanized assault vehicles called Vital Suits. Energy is collected through enemy kills, drums or barrels and data checkpoints that guide you through each level.

Since every activity depletes your energy, you must consistently replenish. If not, your life meter will slowly drain away. It's an intriguing wrinkle that injects intensity, especially during heated fights.

Unfortunately, unless you're fighting a boss, you'll rarely run into this problem. Finding sources of thermal energy is incredibly easy. Because thermal energy makes you near indestructible, any challenge or fears of dying are vanquished.

The controls lack consistency. Wayne moves around slowly, which makes sense when you're plodding through snow, but nowhere else. Operating the camera and targeting reticle is equally as sluggish. Instead of creating a normal-moving camera, the left and right bumper buttons are wasted on implementing quick turns.

Operating the Vital Suits is far more entertaining. Mechs can switch between a nice assortment of weapons, from Gatling guns to missile launchers. Vital Suits are also a must for speeding up the game's pace.

Inconsistencies extend to enemies as well, where you'll battle both Akrid and snow pirates. Your alien foes are more aggressive, and offer fewer weak spots. Snow pirates, on the other hand, are pushovers.

Visually, Lost Planet is powerful. The icy backdrops create bright, vibrant landscapes. The larger Akrid creatures are daunting. Explosions, fires and other elements pack plenty of punch.

Despite the negative aspects, Lost Planet delights the senses with
nail-biting boss battles and chilling backgrounds. But a stronger influence
from the weather elements and consistent gameplay could have turned a
decent shooter into a gaming classic.

                              =~=~=~=

                        A-ONE's Headline News
                 The Latest in Computer Technology News
                    Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

                  Who Does Net Neutrality Benefit?

Washington wasted no time in the new year getting back to the business of
Net neutrality. Sens. Byron Dorgan, D-N.D., and Olympia Snowe, R-Maine,
introduced the Internet Freedom Preservation Act of 2007 last week. The
bill came less than two weeks after AT&T conceded to network neutrality
commitments in its merger with BellSouth.

The bill seeks to ensure that broadband service providers don't "interfere
with, discriminate against, impair, or degrade" any Internet applications
- in particular by charging more for certain services or content. Snowe
said the legislation would help keep the Internet in the hands of users,
"not a few gatekeepers." Dorgan and Snowe introduced similar legislation
last year, but it never made it to a vote.

Net neutrality would seem to be a pet project of the new Democratic
majority. Sens. Barbara Boxer of California, Hillary Clinton of New York,
Tom Harkin of Iowa, John Kerry of Massachusetts, Patrick Leahy of Vermont,
and Barack Obama of Illinois are co-sponsoring this latest bill.

Opponents of Net neutrality say the legislation benefits large Web
companies like Google, while forcing consumers to bear the cost of
upgrading U.S. communications networks.

                  Seagate Claims World's Fastest Hard Drive

In the world of hard-drive technology, Seagate has unveiled a stunner.
Today, the California-based storage company introduced what could likely be
the world's fastest hard drive - the Savvio 15K, the newest member of the
Savvio brood of 2.5-inch drives designed for enterprise applications.

Seagate, one of the pioneers in developing the 2.5-inch format, is hoping
to replace the more widely used 3.5-inch format with the smaller drives.
And that progression appears to be imminent, according to industry experts.

"The trend in I.T. is to scale down the physical size of components while
scaling up capacity and performance," John Rydning, IDC's research manager
for hard disk drives, said in statement published on Seagate's Web site.

The new drive boasts a 2.9-millisecond seek time and a spindle speed of 15,000 RPM, but perhaps the coolest feature of the new drive is what it doesn't do - suck up a lot of energy.

According to Seagate, the Savvio 15K uses 30 percent less power than any other 15K drive. This reduction can equal huge savings in big data centers, according to Dianne McAdam, director of enterprise information assurance for The Clipper Group, a Massachusetts-based technology consulting firm.

"A lot of these large data centers are wanting to be more energy efficient," she said. "Clearly, all large data centers are looking at ways to save power and bring in equipment that saves power."

While the new drives are certainly faster, she said, the green factor is just as critical.

Just how much of a power wallop are we talking about? The 15,000 RPM speed is usually what you see on a performance drive. Most enterprise-class hard drives for use in data centers typically spin at 10,000 RPM and are designed for capacity, not performance.

What is so interesting about the Savvio 15K, said McAdam, is its ability to pack so much into a tiny device. "Its so small, and yet so much more powerful," she said.

Seagate has said that the 2.5-inch platform represents a new way of thinking - the ability to pack more punch into a smaller machine. McAdam said she agrees with that sentiment, but stressed the "greening of the data center" as the real breakthrough.

Microsoft To Offer Windows Vista Online

Microsoft Corp. will make its new Windows Vista operating system available for sale and download online, marking a new step for the software company, which has previously sold Windows only on packaged discs or pre-loaded on computers.

A relatively low number of computer users are likely to get Vista by downloading it from the Internet. But the mere availability indicates that Microsoft is fiddling with distribution methods for the extremely profitable franchise at the core of its business.

The download program, being announced late Wednesday by the Redmond, Wash.-based software maker, will also include the Office 2007 line of software when both are released for consumers Jan. 30. At least initially, the huge downloads will be available in North America only.

Far more commonly, consumers will get Vista already installed on new PCs bought after Jan. 30. The download process is targeted at people who are running the prior operating system, Windows XP, and want to get Vista without having to buy a new PC. However, Vista imposes hardware requirements that not all Windows XP machines can meet.

For those who do buy Vista the normal way, Microsoft is launching a new program that makes it easier to upgrade from one edition of the operating system to another.

Here's how that will work. For consumers, Vista will come in four flavors, Home Basic, which retails for $199, Home Premium ($239) Business ($299) and Ultimate ($399). Though consumers will pick one version when they buy a computer, higher versions will be embedded on the machine's hard drive or packaged on discs that come with it.

Anyone who wants to move up the chain from Home Basic to Home Premium for another $79, Home Basic to Ultimate ($199), Home Premium to Ultimate ($159), or Business to Ultimate ($139) will be able to click a new "Windows Anytime Upgrade" function, pay for the upgrade online and then receive a coded license "key" that will unlock the more expensive edition.

Microsoft also plans a promotion that will let buyers of Vista Ultimate get $50 copies of Home Premium for two other PCs.

Bill Mannion, director of consumer marketing for Windows, called these three steps part of an overall effort "to give more flexibility to end users."

Matt Rosoff, an analyst with Directions on Microsoft, said the company likely was hoping to increase the incentives for consumers to buy costlier versions of Vista. Indeed, much of the marketing surrounding Vista will highlight features available only in higher-end versions, such as the new three-dimensional user interface and encryption functions.

Storm Worm Hits Computers Around The World

Computer virus writers attacked thousands of computers on Friday using an unusually topical email citing raging European storms, a security company said.

The virus, which the company named "Storm Worm," was emailed to hundreds of thousands of addresses globally with the subject line "230 dead as storm batters Europe."

An attached file contained so-called malware that can infiltrate computer systems.

"What makes this exceptional is the timely nature of the attack," Mikko Hypponen, head of research at Finnish data security firm F-Secure, told Reuters.

Hypponen said thousands of computers, most in private use, had been affected.

He said most users would not notice the malware, or trojan, which creates a back door to the computer that can be exploited later to steal data or to use the computer to post spam.

MySpace To Offer Parental Notification Software

MySpace.com, News Corp.'s popular online social network, plans to offer free parental notification software in a bid to appease government

critics, The Wall Street Journal reported on Wednesday.

Parents will be able to use the software, named "Zephyr," to find out what name, age and location their children use to represent themselves on MySpace, the Journal said.

It would not allow parents to read their children's e-mail or see their profile pages, and it would alert children that their information was being shared, the paper reported.

The news comes as a group of 33 state attorneys general considers whether to take action against MySpace if it does not raise the age limit to join the site to 16 from 14 and begin verifying members' ages, the paper said.

A lawsuit would make for bad publicity for the site just as advertisers are overcoming their concerns about it, the paper said.

News Corp. bought the service for $580 million in 2005, and some analysts have speculated that it could be worth billions of dollars in the next several years.

Popular among teenagers, the site has had to deal with public criticism that some children who use it provide too much personal information, making them easy prey for sex offenders.

A primary challenge has been to add safety features while not alienating teenagers, the Journal reported.

Another problem is skepticism from the rest of the Internet industry, the paper said. One big question is whether the service would violate users' privacy rights; another is whether other people besides parents could use the software to monitor children, the Journal said.

The privacy question prompted social networking site Facebook and blogging site Xanga to decline to join MySpace's efforts, the paper reported.

Google Inc., Yahoo Inc., Microsoft Corp. and AOL have not said whether they would join the effort, the Journal said.

MySpace said in December that it would start offering technology to identify and block convicted sex offenders. The service would cover about 46 state sex offender registers.

MySpace also requires members over 18 years old to know the e-mail and first and last name of any 14- or 15-year-old members whom they want to contact.

MySpace Hit With Online Predator Suits

Four families have sued News Corp. and its MySpace social-networking site after their underage daughters were sexually abused by adults they met on the site, lawyers for the families said Thursday.

The law firms, Barry & Loewy LLP of Austin, Texas, and Arnold & Itkin LLP of Houston, said families from New York, Texas, Pennsylvania and South Carolina filed separate suits Wednesday in Los Angeles Superior Court, alleging negligence, recklessness, fraud and negligent misrepresentation

by the companies.

"In our view, MySpace waited entirely too long to attempt to institute meaningful security measures that effectively increase the safety of their underage users," said Jason A. Itkin, an Arnold & Itkin lawyer.

The families are seeking monetary damages "in the millions of dollars," Itkin said.

"Hopefully these lawsuits can spur MySpace into action and prevent this from happening to another child somewhere," he said.

Critics including parents, school officials and police have been increasingly warning of online predators at sites like MySpace, where youth-oriented visitors are encouraged to expand their circles of friends using free messaging tools and personal profile pages.

MySpace has responded with added educational efforts and partnerships with law enforcement. The company has also placed restrictions on how adults may contact younger users on MySpace, while developing technologies such as one announced Wednesday to let parents see some aspects of their child's online profile, including the stated age. That tool is expected this summer.

"MySpace serves as an industry leader on Internet safety and we take proactive measures to protect our members," Hemanshu Nigam, MySpace's chief security officer, said in a statement. "We provide users with a range of tools to enable a safer online experience."

But he said Internet safety is a shared responsibility, requiring users to "apply common sense offline safety lessons in their online experiences and engage in open family dialogue."

The lawyers who filed the latest lawsuits said the plaintiffs include a 15-year-old girl from Texas who was lured to a meeting, drugged and assaulted in 2006 by an adult MySpace user, who is currently serving a 10-year sentence in Texas after pleading guilty to sexual assault.

The others are a 15-year-old girl from Pennsylvania, a 14-year-old from upstate New York and two South Carolina sisters, ages 14 and 15.

Last June, the mother of a 14-year-old who says the youth was sexually assaulted by a 19-year-old user sued MySpace and News Corp., seeking $30 million in damages. That lawsuit, pending in a Texas state court, claims the 19-year-old lied about being a senior in high school to gain her trust and phone number.

New E-mail Scam In US Threatens Recipients

A new spam campaign claiming to come from a hit man is cropping up in e-mail boxes across the United States with recipients ordered to fork out thousands of dollars or face death.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) is urging people not to respond to the e-mail, which first surfaced in December and is thought to originate from overseas.

The e-mail claims that the sender is a hit man hired to kill the recipient

and that the contract on that person's life will be canceled if a large
sum of money is paid.

The message warns recipients not to contact authorities.

One person who responded to the e-mail received another message containing
his work address, marital status and daughter's name, the FBI said.

It added that a new twist on the scam involves e-mails now purporting to
be from the FBI office in London and claiming that someone recently
arrested for several murders in the US and Britain was carrying
information identifying the recipient as the next victim.

The e-mail calls on the recipient to respond to the e-mail to help assist
in the investigation.

The FBI is urging people not to respond to the e-mails as doing so could
compromise their identities and open them to identity theft.

New Spam Trick: Mimic Legit Newsletters

Spammers have something new in their bag of tricks.

Those ubiquitous Viagra ads have been disguising themselves as e-mail
newsletters, the kind you get to find out the latest airline deals or keep
up with your fantasy football team.

Spammers haven't actually broken into legitimate marketers' computer
systems to send out the messages. Rather, like the phishing scams that
lift the code off the real Web sites of financial institutions, spammers
have tweaked legitimate e-mail and sent them through normal spam channels.

The technique appears aimed at bypassing human and software controls.
Recipients might not immediately realize they are opening spam, and
anti-spam filters might not be able to aggressively block them for fear of
blocking legitimate newsletters as well, anti-spam experts say.

These messages started appearing a month ago, and so far, they have been
relatively small in numbers, said Doug Bowers, senior director of
anti-abuse engineering at Symantec Corp., a vendor of anti-spam products.
He suspects spammers are fine-tuning their techniques to see what works.

"It's sort of the early warning sign for us," Bowers said.

Universal Phishing Kit Selling Online

A phishing kit that EMC's security division first discovered last week is
still being sold and used online by fraudsters. The software, known as the
Universal Man-in-the-Middle Phishing Kit, is designed to help fraudsters
capture victims' personal information in real-time, according to RSA, the
security division of EMC.

RSA is reporting that the phishing kit includes an online interface to
help create bogus Web sites that can pull content from legitimate Web

sites, such as banks or online retailers, in real-time. When unsuspecting victims visit these bogus sites and enter their usernames and passwords, the fraudsters gain immediate access to the private data.

"As institutions put additional online security measures in place, inevitably the fraudsters are looking at new ways of duping innocent victims and stealing their information and assets," said Marc Gaffan, director of marketing in the Consumer Solutions division at RSA, in a published statement.

The Universal Man-in-the-Middle Phishing Kit offers fraudsters two primary benefits, according to RSA.

First, it is a universal phishing kit. That means fraudsters who want to initiate a phishing attack do not have to purchase or prepare a custom phishing kit for each target. Once they acquire and operate this kit, the attack can be configured to import pages from any target Web site.

Second, unlike standard phishing attacks, which only collect specific requested data (such as passwords or credit-card numbers), this attack is designed to intercept any type of credentials submitted to the site.

"While these types of attacks are still considered 'next generation,' we expect them to become more widespread over the course of the next 12 to 18 months," Gaffan predicted.

Security researchers agree that phishing attacks will continue to make headlines in 2007 as the economics of phishing mature and malicious technologies get more sophisticated.

"Criminals are no longer profiting from just the crime itself; they are now profiting by offering services to other criminals," said Michael Sutton, security evangelist at security firm SPI Dynamics. "The availability of point-and-click tools such as this lowers the bar by making advanced attacks available to a wider range of would-be phishers."

Sutton predicted that, while the majority of today's phishing attacks are still relatively unsophisticated, they will increase in sophistication even as targeted sites strengthen their security controls.

"In order to defend against man-in-the-middle attacks, users should avoid clicking on links in e-mail messages," he warned.

          Man Found Guilty of Targeting AOL Customers in Phishing Scam

A 45-year-old California man convicted Jan. 12 of operating a sophisticated phishing scheme designed to steal personal and credit card information faces 101 years in prison.

Jeffrey Brett Goodin of Azusa became the first defendant convicted by a jury under the provisions of the CAN-SPAM Act of 2003, announced prosecutors in the U.S. Attorney's Office in the Central District of California. He was found guilty of sending thousands of e-mails to America Online users under the guise of messages from AOL's billing department that prompted customers to send personal and credit card information. He then used the information to make unauthorized purchases, officials said.

"Money mules" play a big part in phishing. Prosecutors argued during the weeklong trial that Goodin used several compromised Earthlink accounts to send the e-mails to AOL users. Those e-messages urged recipients to "update" their AOL billing information before they lost service and referred the AOL customers to one of several Web pages to input their personal and credit information, officials said. Goodin controlled those Web pages and used the information so he and others could make unauthorized charges on the AOL users' credit or debit cards.

In addition to the CAN-SPAM Act conviction, Goodin was convicted of 10 other counts, including wire fraud, aiding and abetting the unauthorized use of an access device (credit card), possession of more than 15 unauthorized access devices, misuse of the AOL trademark, attempted witness harassment, and failure to appear in court, officials said.

He is scheduled to be sentenced by United States District Court Judge Christina Snyder on June 11, officials said.

Botnet Gang Faces Jail

Dutch prosecutors are pursuing jail terms for two men charged in a large-scale computer hacking scheme in which more than 1 million computers may have been infected with adware and other malicious programs.

The case is the biggest cybercrime case prosecuted so far in the Netherlands, said Desiree Leppens, spokesperson for the organized crime branch of the National Public Prosecution Service in Rotterdam.

During a one-day trial that ended Tuesday, prosecutors showed how at least 50,000 computers were infected by the two defendants, who are 20 and 28 years old. Police have not released their names.

The pair used a malicious program called "Toxbot," a worm that can be used to gain remote control of a computer and log keystrokes, prosecutors said.

Prosecutors also charge that the defendants threatened an advertising software maker, 180Solutions, now renamed Zango, with a denial-of-service attack after a dispute over payment. Zango settled with the U.S. Federal Trade Commission in November for $3 million after concern that distributors of its software were installing it on peoples' computers without their consent, often by exploiting vulnerabilities in operating systems or Web browsers.

Prosecutors also allege the pair were involved in phishing schemes, where fraudulent Web sites are constructed to harvest personal information such as bank-account or credit-card details. The two used a Trojan horse called "Wayphisher", which on an infected machine can redirect a Web site request from a legitimate bank site to a phishing site.

Prosecutors want a three-year sentence for the 20-year-old and two years for the 28-year-old and and each to pay $38,000 to the Dutch government, Leppens said. A judge will return a verdict in the case on January 30.

Four others involved in the ring who are facing lesser charges will go to trial later this year, Leppens said.

The various schemes caused at least $75,000 in losses to victims, through online purchases and other actions, Leppens said.

Designers Work To Make Web Accessible

Cynthia Ice is blind and lives in the suburbs, so shopping on the Internet can make her routine easier. But it also leads her into odd dead ends - like the time a technical shift in a Web grocery site made its meat department inaccessible to her screen-reading software.

"Everybody could go on the Atkins diet but me," she joked.

Such troubles are especially common for computer users with disabilities as the Web takes on many features that make sites appear more like dynamic programs than static documents.

While that design trend gives many people more engaging Web experiences, good old static documents can be much easier for screen-reading software to decipher and narrate to the blind. Such software has trouble interpreting newer "Web 2.0" features, such as text that pops up without a mouse click, or data that automatically update in real time.

"The new technology being implemented poses even more of a threat to the small accessibility wins we have made," Steven Tyler, who heads disability access services at Britain's Royal National Institute for the Blind, wrote in an e-mail. "Around 80 percent of Web sites we estimate as having accessibility problems, some considerable."

However, progress is being made on programming hooks that would help screen-reading tools grasp the new Web's advanced layers of content. Web architects at IBM Corp. have been laboring on a system called iAccessible2 that addresses some common scenarios bedeviling screen-reading software.

For example, consider software "trees" where clicking on little plus or minus signs in boxes expands data or rolls it up. To the ears of someone using screen-reading software, the setup can present a hard-to-visualize jumble.

To deal with this, iAccessible2 makes it possible for a blind user to be told where text on the screen lies in the tree. A bit of text might be the second item on a list of five, for example, at a "depth" of two - meaning it required a click to be revealed.

Aspects of iAccessible2 are being integrated into the open-source Firefox Web browser. The technology also is entering IBM's Lotus and Workplace office-productivity programs. Ice, 48, who has been blind for 20 years because of diabetes, helps lead the effort in Lotus.

A longer-term goal is to make it easier for blind people to deal with Web pages that offer complicated stews of changing information.

IBM Web architect Aaron Leventhal pointed to basketball box scores that dynamically update dozens of statistics as a game progresses. A sighted person easily can zero in on the most vital information, the game score, and glance only occasionally at unfolding data of lesser importance, such as free-throw percentages.

But how can a screen-reading program know to utter only certain stats as they are updated and not every single one?

Leventhal and colleagues believe one answer is to encode parts of a Web page - in this case, certain statistics - as "rude," "assertive" and "polite."

Screen-reading software could be programmed to vocalize "polite" information anytime and the "assertive" data less frequently.

This concept is still in development, but Leventhal hopes it becomes part of Web production tools so site designers bake it in as they create pages.

"We don't want accessibility to be the thing that limits what people can do on their Web sites," Leventhal said. "We're not trying to slow down the world. We're trying to say, take accessibility into account."

For Web designers, more foresight surrounding inclusiveness could become crucial to their business, as the aging baby boomer population requires more assistance.

Already, Target Corp.'s Web site is the subject of a closely watched federal lawsuit testing whether the Internet falls under the Americans With Disabilities Act.

While much of iAccessible2 is geared toward blind people's navigation of the Web, it also is aimed at desktop software - including open-source programs that are alternatives to Microsoft Corp.'s dominant Windows and Office products.

Because of Microsoft's enormous market share, makers of assistive add-on software have devoted most of their resources to ensuring compatibility with Windows and Office. As a result, software outside that fold is often troublesome for blind people.

Screen-readers' access to Microsoft programs relies on the company's Accessibility Architecture, a programming system invented a decade ago.

IAccessible2 is essentially an update of it. Meanwhile, Microsoft has spent the past few years honing a new approach it believes will be more powerful.

Generally, Web sites have had to inform assistive technologies which specific controls or inputs they were using. That's why advanced Web sites with "slider bars" and other dynamic functions can befuddle screen readers - essentially, the assistive programs hadn't been told they might encounter those particular Web environments.

The fix has generally been to constantly update the list of functions that assistive technologies would encounter, and add the necessary programming links.

But under Microsoft's new system, known as User Interface Automation, Web and application designers don't have to label the names of each function. Instead they select from a list of 18 criteria to describe what each function does - it pulls down a menu, for example, or it makes text expand.

This way, screen readers react to the behavior of a particular function

on the Web and not whatever label it happened to get in the programming
code.

"It lets them deal with controls that have yet to be invented," said Rob
Sinclair, who heads Microsoft's assistive technologies group. The
process no longer has to be "a continual maintenance nightmare."

For now, programmers and assistive technology vendors still have to
figure out how to incorporate User Interface Automation with other
technologies, including iAccessible2. However, Doug Geoffray, vice
president of development of GW Micro Inc., a maker of software for the
blind, said his field always expects such complexities.

"It's a never-ending battle," he said.

Beijing Olympic Officials Not Amused By Online Pranks

Beijing Games organizers have threatened legal action against online
pranksters who poke fun at official Olympic symbols after a rash of
digital spoofs appeared on the Internet.

An image of the 2008 Olympic emblem "Dancing Beijing" circulated on Chinese
Web sites and chat-rooms this week - the original symbol of a human figure
in motion morphed into "male" and "female" symbols commonly seen on public
toilet doors.

The 2008 Olympic mascots - cartoon representations of four animals and the
Olympic flame - were also targeted, their heads replaced by Japanese
cartoon heroes, Chinese pop idol finalists and celebrity footballers
including David Beckham.

The Beijing Organizing Committee for the 2008 Olympic Games (BOCOG) said
the practice was "tarnishing the Olympic spirit."

"It's a rights violation that contravenes our country's laws and
regulations," an unnamed BOCOG legal affairs spokesman said in a statement
on BOCOG's Web site.

"We hold the right to carry out legal action against such offenders," the
statement said.

The spoofing of Beijing's Olympic symbols continues a trend of sending up
sacred cows of Chinese history and popular culture on the Internet in
recent months.

Last August, China's State Administration for Radio, Film and Television
announced it was preparing legislation banning the creation of
unauthorized short films that mock officially approved culture.

=~=~=~=